

March 3, 2009

HILINE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

The BLM is preparing a resource management plan for lands under the jurisdiction of the Malta Field Office. The RMP will direct the long-term management on about 2,420,000 acres of surface and 3,520,000 acres of federal mineral estate within eight counties of north central Montana. This plan will replace the West HiLine RMP and the Valley and Phillips portion of the Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP. Formal public scoping was completed in October 2006.

ISSUES:

Key issues to be addressed in the plan are energy development, including fluid mineral leases; vegetation and invasive species management; land tenure; access; off-highway vehicles; greater sage-grouse habitat; and special management areas for resource protection.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

In May 2006, the Montana State Office approved a preparation plan. Public scoping began September 9, 2006, with the publication of the notice of intent, and ended November 15, 2006. A report completed in May 2007 summarized the scoping process, including the solicitation of public comment and identification/refinement of the planning issues; it is available at the Malta Field Office.

Local economic strategies workshops were conducted in February 2007 in three HiLine communities: Shelby, Chinook, and Glasgow. The purpose of these workshops was to identify how the local and regional economy has changed and its relationship to public land management. Information discussed during these workshops provides a greater insight into planning issues and allows greater opportunities for collaborative planning.

Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) have been formalized to establish cooperating agency status for the following agencies: Phillips, Valley, and Blaine county commissions; Bureau of Reclamation; and Bureau of Indian Affairs. The BLM is also working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Additionally, MOUs establish cooperating agency status for the following eight cooperative state grazing districts: Badlands, Buggy Creek, North Blaine, North Phillips, North Valley, South Phillips, Wayne Creek, and Willow Creek. Ongoing outreach continues to develop opportunities for collaborative planning.

A reasonable range of alternatives was developed in summer 2008 with involvement of the various cooperating agencies. A preferred alternative is being developed in consultation with the cooperating agencies and a reasonably foreseeable development plan for oil and gas is being finalized by the BLM Wyoming State Office (Casper).

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

Public interest will be high because of energy development, greater sage-grouse populations, off-highway vehicle use, and special management areas.

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